

HOME & GARDEN INFORMATION CENTER

Redbud

Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), also called Judas tree, is an outstanding, deciduous ornamental tree in South Carolina. A small tree native to the eastern United States, its rosy pink blossoms open early in spring and are as colorful as any flowering spring tree in the landscape. It is adapted to all areas of South Carolina.



Eastern redbud tree

Paul Wray, Iowa State University, www.ipmimages.org

Mature Height/Spread

Redbuds always remain small, maturing at 20 to 30 feet in height and 15 to 35 feet in width. They generally grow as a small tree with a divided trunk close to the ground. The spreading crown is usually rounded to flat-topped. It can develop as a multi-trunk shrub. Redbuds growing in the sun will be compact and rounded; when grown in shade, their form is loose, open and tall.

Growth Rate

Redbuds grow at a moderate rate, about 7 to 10 feet in five to six years. They tend to be short-lived, often declining from disease after about 20 years.

Ornamental Features

The most appealing feature of this tree is the showy flower, which is magenta in bud, but opens to rosy pink before the leaves emerge early in spring. The flowers appear in clusters that nearly cover the bare branches of the tree. They remain for two to three weeks. They usually appear in early spring after the white flowers of serviceberry and wild plum and before (and during) the white and pink flowers of the flowering dogwood. Although the flower of the species is pink, certain cultivars have white flowers. The heart-shaped leaves are reddish as they emerge, and gradually turn dark green in summer. The fall color is yellow.



Eastern redbud flowers

Paul Wray, Iowa State University, www.ipmimages.org

The fruit are long, flat pods (3 inches) which are produced from late summer into fall, and remain on the tree during winter. They become conspicuous in the fall when the leaves drop, and can sometimes be unsightly when mature.

Landscape Use

This tree is best used in naturalized areas, where the flowers are contrasted against evergreens or woodlands. It can be used as a specimen or in groupings in a shrub border.

Although the redbud does well in most soil types, it prefers moist, well-drained sites. It does not, however, like those that are permanently wet. It tolerates acid or alkaline soils. It grows well in full sun but prefers some shade in the heat of summer. Although it will grow in fairly dense shade, it blooms more heavily when exposed to sun. Redbuds tolerate moderate dry spells, but do better when irrigated in summer dry spells.

Transplant when very small, as they have difficulty surviving, transplant after the root system has developed.

As redbud is native to such a wide range of climates, it is important that you purchase a tree that was grown from locally harvested seed. Trees grown from seed collected from trees native to South Carolina will adapt to our climate. If the seed were collected from trees grown in the north, the tree may not withstand the heat of our summer.

When located near a walkway or patio, low branches must be pruned for clearance beneath the canopy. It can be trained to grow with a single or multiple trunks. Prune out dead branches.

Problems

Canker is the most destructive disease. Wounds created by pruning or mechanical injury serve as entry points for the fungus that infects the wood and causes cankers. Avoid wounding to minimize susceptibility to this disease. Insects such as treehoppers, caterpillars, scales and leafhoppers can also cause damage.

Cultivars & Varieties

- var. *alba* - This is a white-flowered form that occurs somewhat frequently in nature. The foliage is a lighter green than the species.
- 'Royal White' - This cultivar has larger flowers and a more compact form than var. *alba*.
- 'Forest Pansy' - This is one of the most popular cultivars. It has deep burgundy foliage that loses its intense color in the heat of summer, becoming almost dark green. Flowers are more rose purple than the species and open a little later.
- 'Flame' - This is a double-pink form.

Related Species

- Chinese Redbud (*C. chinensis*) - This is a small, multi-stemmed shrub that grows 6 to 10 feet tall and wide. Its rosy purple flowers are showier and more profuse than Eastern Redbud. Leaves are also thicker.

Note: Chemical control of diseases and insects on large trees is usually not feasible since adequate coverage of the foliage with a pesticide cannot be achieved.

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